



Statement by Mr. Staffan de Mistura,
Deputy Executive Director
World Food Programme

World Climate Conference -3
3 September 2009

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates,

I would like first to thank our host for organising the third World Climate Conference. This is not just another Conference, this is a historical milestone as we get closer to COP 15 next December.

An increasingly challenging environment

The increasing number of climate and weather-related disasters and the impact that these may have on vulnerable people is troubling. While the number of hungry people has reached 1 billion, the number of people at risk from climate and weather-related disasters has increased to 2.6 billion¹. Sadly, once again, the developing countries, which host more than 90 percent of the people exposed to natural disasters, are bearing the brunt².

One of the most direct impacts of climate change is an increasing risk of hunger and malnutrition, resulting from more extreme weather events, lower agricultural productivity and increased water and land scarcity in already vulnerable regions. In other words, food security is at stake. In Kenya, last month's assessment findings indicate that 3.8 million people require urgent humanitarian food assistance, up from the already-assisted 2.6 million drought-affected people, as a result of several factors, including the failure of three consecutive rainy seasons.

¹ Report: "Hazards of Nature, Risks to Development" - the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (IEG); 2006.

² UNEP 2007. Fourth Global Environment Outlook: environment for development assessment report. Chapter 7. Vulnerability of People and the Environment: Challenges and Opportunities. Page 302

How can WFP help?

WFP fights hunger in the frontline of complex humanitarian crises. Some of the triggers of these crises, such as droughts, floods, degradation of natural resources, or conflicts over access to natural resources, will be increasingly linked to, or exacerbated by, climate change.

In response to climate change, communities and households may change their livelihood strategies and adjust their coping mechanisms. Understanding and facilitating these changes is key in building resilience.

Since its creation, relying on its deep-field presence, and working very closely with Governments, national and local institutions, and the people from the poorest and most food insecure parts of the world, WFP has been on the ground to meet immediate hunger needs, contribute to community development, and help build more resilient livelihoods, including at the aftermath of weather disasters.

A crucial aspect of reducing vulnerability to climate-induced food insecurity is the availability of climate-related information and its accessibility to decision-makers. WFP's knowledge of existing vulnerabilities to food insecurity and climatic hazards, coupled with the availability of better climate information provided by experts, such as the WMO, enable us to reinforce governments' and partners' ability to prioritise, and implement urgent climate change adaptation activities.

WFP is working with scientific and academic partners to develop flood and drought forecasting models. Satellite imaging and remote sensing analysis is also used to produce early impact assessment maps - providing a clear picture of the affects of disasters on populations and infrastructure. We have, thus, the right information, to take the right preparedness and response decision--fast.

Let me give you some examples of how we have used them:

- In Bangladesh, in November 2007, WFP's early warning was able to track cyclone Sidr's progress and assess the number of people in its path.

Result: the information provided to the teams working with the Government and humanitarian partners was instrumental in preparing for the storm and the evacuation of some 3.2 million.

- In Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, effective early warning systems have allowed us to monitor the formation of hurricanes and intervene ahead of their landfall with preparedness activities, including food prepositioning at risk areas.

WFP is also leading innovation in the development of tools and services that can increase the capacity of countries and communities that are food insecure to manage climate risks. Among them, is the weather-indexed insurance, an innovative financial product based on local weather indices that are closely correlated to local yields.

Looking ahead

Weather and climate related events make the fight against hunger more challenging. If left unaddressed, we undoubtedly risk witnessing increased poverty and hardship. We cannot and should not allow this happen.

Progress in assessing and reducing the exacerbating effects of climate and weather related events can only be the result of joint efforts and better climate information. We at WFP are proud of the strengthened cooperation we have with various partners such as our host, Governments, national and local institutions, and meteorological services. WFP warmly welcomes the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS), an important platform complementing provider and user of climate information.

The future being inherently unpredictable, joint efforts need to be renewed to address and meet these challenges head-on. We look forward to working closely for the benefit of those whose lives and livelihoods are at risk.